



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA media release - for immediate release, 6th June 2013

NFLA submits its views to DECC on the way forward with management of high and intermediate level radioactive waste

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) has responded (1) to the UK Government's consultation seeking views on the 'Managing Radioactive Waste Safely' (MRWS) process (2), following the January 2013 decision by Cumbria County Council to curtail its involvement in finding a suitable location for a deep-underground radioactive waste repository (3).

Cumbria's decision now means there is currently no volunteer community willing to host such a facility in the UK. The Department of Energy and Climate Change's consultation seeks to learn lessons from the recent MRWS process and also seek views as to how to take a new process forward in finding a long-term solution to the management of the UK's existing radioactive waste legacy.

The main points put forward in the NFLA response include:

- An exercise to ensure that the definition of 'community' in the context of radioactive waste disposal is robust and can stand scrutiny needs to take place. The results of such an exercise should be peer reviewed by an appropriate body of experts.
- There should be an aim to identify the issues pertaining to 'potentially affected communities' such as, for example, radiological risk; impact on house prices; economic benefits etc.
- Any new process offering options to be presented to volunteer communities needs to demonstrate that at every key decision point the 'community' is still in support of the process.
- The establishment of some ground rules on community benefit packages – it should be clear from the outset that volunteering will be more about the effort required, cost and time involved in organising a comprehensive and extensive engagement process instead of seeing community benefits in terms of the government paying for unrelated infrastructure benefit. On the other hand this needs to be seen as a positive opportunity to develop a decommissioning and legacy waste management industry with associated export opportunities rather than as a desperate attempt by an economically depressed area to gain some benefit from taking waste more prosperous areas want to get rid of.
- A review of the former MRWS process and which aspects were positive and should be retained; such as the staged process, the right to withdraw, partnership, volunteerism and participation etc.
- A full consideration of the security issues around the storage of high and intermediate level radioactive active waste, both in existing facilities and in any new facilities that will be developed in the future.

The NFLA response also argues that the first CoRWM (Committee on Radioactive Waste Management) report to the previous UK Government may have recommended 'deep geological disposal' but only with a substantial amount of important caveats which were largely ignored by successive Governments. These recommendations should be part of any new MRWS process. Proposed new build waste should be treated completely separately to this process.

NFLA recommends Government establish an Oversight Committee for a new MRWS process which includes experts on social science and ethics. It also strongly encourages that such a committee can oversee a fund to which communities and NGOs can pay for independent expertise, as has taken place in Sweden and Finland.

NFLA also sees an urgent need for the MRWS process to consider the "retrievability" issue in relation to a deep-underground repository. This remains the NFLA's most pressing concern with the

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construction of such a facility and the previous MRWS process was disconcerting in mixing up concepts of 'disposal' and storage'.

NFLA argues for a full, open and transparent process in the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's development of the generic uncertainties in developing an appropriate facility, involving full engagement with a wide stakeholder community.

Finally, in its implementation report CoRWM 1 proposed that areas unsuitable, on scientific, geological or other grounds, should be screened out before an invitation to participate is issued. This was one of CoRWM's key proposals that were **not** implemented in the MRWS process to date. The first step in a new process must be to review the existing UK data and identify the most appropriate geological areas of the country before asking for any new volunteer communities.

Councillor Mark Hackett, Chair of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) said:

"The Government's previous MRWS process had many welcome elements to it, but largely failed because of the large levels of uncertainty, technical and scientific, which had not been resolved before it had been instigated. I welcome the Government seeking views on what to do next. In the NFLA's view this requires a considerable rethinking around openness and transparency, a geological screening of the UK and full discussion on the retrievability of the waste. Only then should requests for volunteer communities be made. This process has failed time and again because it has not been undertaken in such a way. Now is the opportune time to do so."

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For more information please contact:

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Notes for editors:

- (1) The NFLA response is attached with this media release.
- (2) DECC Open Consultation - Managing Radioactive Waste Safely: Call for Evidence on the Siting Process for a Geological Disposal Facility. May 2013
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/managing-radioactive-waste-safely-call-for-evidence-on-the-siting-process-for-a-geological-disposal-facility>
- (3) BBC Online, 30th January <http://bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-21253673>

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